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UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATION

SPEECH

DELIVERED AT THE BANQUET OF THE KANSAS DEMOCRATIC CLUB, HELD ON FEBRUARY 22, 1918, IN TOPEKA, KANS.

By

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SENATOR FROM KANSAS

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UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATION.

[Speech delivered by Senator WILLIAM H. THOMPSON, at the banquet of the Kansas Democratic Club, in Topeka, Kans., Feb. 22, 1918.]

It is certainly fitting that the Democrats should celebrate Washington's Birthday for there has been no man since the illustrious Father of His Country until our present great President, Woodrow Wilson, of whom it could be more truthfully said, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

The Republican politicians may strain at gnats, criticize little things, howl like wolves, and kick like mules, yet when all is said and done the American people will still have implicit faith and confidence in Woodrow Wilson. The opposition has been unable, and will be unable to swerve him in the least from the straight path of duty honestly, fearlessly, and faithfully performed.

All this criticism of Daniels and Baker is an indirect attack on the President. The Republican bosses have not quite yet the nerve or the gall—and they have plenty of both—to make a direct attack on the President, for they are even smart enough to know that the American people will not stand for it. So they are using their old political tactics of trying to fool the people by finding fault with the Cabinet, in the hope of having the people believe there is something wrong somewhere.

They first jumped on to Secretary Daniels, one of the cleanest, ablest, and most farseeing men who has ever been Secretary of the Navy. The animus of the attack on Daniels had its root no doubt in the fact that he carried to the Navy the Kansas idea that intoxicating liquor should be eliminated from the Navy and all our fighting forces. Who will now say that he failed in his duty when he made this order, or that Congress was not justified in protecting our boys in the military service from the sale of intoxicating liquor?

Secretary Daniels ignored the abuse heaped upon him and went on building and improving the Navy until we now have a Navy ranking among the best in the world; and the statement of the President at St. Louis two years ago, which met with so much criticism from the Republican press, that we should have the greatest Navy in the world, will soon be realized under Secretary Daniels. You have no doubt noticed they have quit criticizing Daniels. Even a prominent Republican, Senator Kenyon, of Iowa, on the floor of the Senate a few days ago said:

> In this era of criticism no criticism can be made of our Navy. Lloyd George a few days ago congratulated our Nation on the splendid work of our Navy. Let no one say we have done nothing in this war. We helped to destroy the submarine. Our Navy is doing some of the most essential work of the war. All honor to the boys of the American Navy, to the work of Admiral Sims, and to the splendidly efficient Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels.

So the opposition had to look for another subject, and they observed that Secretary Baker was even a smaller man in stature than Daniels; and they thought perhaps by the aid of their biggest elephant they could push him over the political precipice. So with the help of a few peeved Democrats they jumped on to Baker, but they did not get very far until this little fellow stood his ground, and afoot and alone, he pushed the whole business overboard. They have since been struggling to find out how best they can save their own faces.

But it has not all been the fault of the Republican politicians in Congress. We have had a new White House male picket down at Washington. He paraded with his banner up and down in front of the White House, but changed the old familiar words "Vote for women" to "Vote for Roosevelt." He even strained his ears so severely listening for a call from the people that he was obliged to go to a hospital and submit to an operation. Roosevelt straining through the fence at the White House as France has been looking at Alsace-Lorraine.

Roosevelt's ambition is the secret of the attack on Baker. He is the father of the so-called "speed up" program, although this administration did more for preparedness in Wilson's first term, when no one expected we would get into the war, than Roosevelt accomplished in his two presidential terms; and after war came, we accomplished more in the first six months, as distinguished representatives from both England and France frankly admitted, than those great countries were able to accomplish in a whole year.

Our war accomplishments have been marvelous and beyond the dreams of the most optimistic. We have transformed the most peaceful nation in the world to the most active warlike nation. The French high commissioner, Mr. Tardieu, said:

> America's military effort has been wonderful and splendid and a surprise to the enemy.

The British high commissioner, Lord Northcliffe, said:

> Swift, unexpected action characterizes the United States in war. The war machine gathers momentum as it passes, its ramifications are bewildering, scarcely a day passes without some fresh and startling proof of its force.

Even the German press admit our great war preparation and ability in this respect, when they say:

> The fact must not be overlooked that the United States, with the support of its capacity and material and industrial management, is arming itself for war with great energy and tenacity.

Everyone knows we had no Army to speak of in the beginning for such an undertaking. We now have the foundation for an Army of 10,000,000 men, accomplished through the selective-draft system within 30 days after war was declared, which accomplishment neither Great Britain, France, nor Canada were able to bring about short of two years. We now have 1,500,000 men undergoing intensive training for their great task. We have trebled the size of the Navy, bringing it up to a strength of 330,000 men, and have greatly increased the Marine Corps. We have more than doubled our shipping facilities, giving us a tonnage of over 2,300,000. We are expending $350,000,000 for the building of destroyers, and have turned them out with surprising speed, our first fleet of destroyers reaching the

war zone as early as May 4, 1917. It was almost as much of a surprise to England as it was to Germany, and they have been doing most effective work every day. We are expending $640,000,000 for aeroplane construction, laying the foundation for a fleet of 100,000 aeroplanes, if necessary, enough when in flight to almost obscure the sun from practically all of the German Empire. Announcement was made yesterday that our first shipment of aeroplanes was on the way to France, five months ahead of the expectation of ourselves or the allies. We are constructing Government armor plate and projectile plants and Government powder and nitrate plants. We established 16 training camps and turned out 40,000 officers within three months, and built 16 cantonments which required over a billion feet of lumber and about 100,000 carloads of material, and took over 100,000 workmen, in addition to the soldiers, to do the work. Modern hospitals have been built and placed in charge of competent physicians, surgeons, and nurses, which have been conducted in such manner that the health conditions of our Army is the best in the world, and the best ever known in any war, with only eight soldiers per thousand in a year dying from disease, while in the Spanish-American War the rate was 25 per thousand. In addition to all this, we have several hundred thousand well-trained fighting men, thoroughly equipped, in the trenches in France, more than ten times as many men as Gen. Joffre himself originally thought would be required from this country for the entire war, and all were transported through the war zone without the loss of a single man until the late *Tuscania* disaster, and with the loss of only one American ship. Besides all this, we have raised the necessary money for ourselves as well as our allies to carry on this war, and are prepared to furnish the necessary food for all our allies, and have enough left for ourselves. All this and many other things too numerous to mention have been done within 10 months. Still the critics of the administration say our War Department has fallen down.

You will remember the Republicans told us in the last campaign there was no danger of our getting into the war, and in Congress they fought some of our most important measures for preparedness. Everybody now acknowledges that our greatest need is ships, yet some Republican Senators absolutely filbustered to death the shipping bill which was before Congress as early as 1914 and 1915. They then contended we did not need the extra ships, but now blame us for lack of foresight in not providing them sooner.

The President tried to give the country due notice of the approaching war two years ago. President Wilson was the Paul Revere of this war who rode clear across the continent giving the alarm, exclaiming that the world was on fire and the conflagration was liable to break out here at any time. But few heeded him. You will remember that the present governor of our State, when he introduced the President at the auditorium here in Topeka, told the people that he was not in sympathy with the President's preparedness program, but as President of the United States he was entitled to a hearing. Now this same man and hundreds of other Republican professional politicians are blaming the President for not alarming the country long before so that we could have been better prepared, when they did absolutely nothing themselves when in power and laid every obstacle in our way to prevent earlier preparation.

So politics, pure and simple, is at the bottom of all the criticism against Secretary Baker and this administration, and envious Roosevelt is the chief politician at the head of the movement. He still has dreams of a third term. He fears that if this war continues, and we all hope it will not, there will be a third-term President, and his name will not be Roosevelt. Yet Roosevelt is the only man in the United States of any political party who is so ambitious, so selfish, and so unpatriotic as to now begin his political campaign against a President successfully conducting a war for his country.

The scheme of the Republican bosses is very plain. They first propose to carry Congress, and after that, to use the language of a Republican whom I heard reveal the plan, "gut the President." The political governor of our State, Hon. Arthur Capper, who dreams to be your next Senator, but who will not be if you can prevent it, voiced the Roosevelt doctrine recently in his paper over his own signature, even before Secretary Baker made his reply or was given a hearing. He said:

> The attitude of the President is generally disappointing to the people in his sweeping defense of the War Department and sweeping denial that any serious blunders had been made.

I do not believe, and I know you do not believe, that the people are disappointed in the action of the President or in the reply of Secretary Baker, which is a most complete and overwhelming answer to the charges against the War Department. But Gov. Capper in this same article proves my point that the whole criticism is political when he says:

> When the President went outside of his party to select Elihu Root to head the mission to Russia, the wisdom of that choice was recognized and commended the world over. If the President would summon to his aid such administrative giants as Taft and Roosevelt and Root and Hughes * * * how the country would rise to it.

My Lord, haven't the people had enough of that crowd, if we are to believe their action at the polls? Ah, this is the milk in the coconut: If the President would only turn his administration over to Republican office seekers who have been repudiated by the people of the United States at the polls, except Root—and even his mission to Russia has resulted in complete failure—everything would be all right. Gov. Capper is willing to commend Republicans who have failed in their endeavors, but unwilling to say a good word for Democrats who have been successful in their faithful labors.

The one great task before the country is to win the war. If the present administration is left in control the war will be won, and won much more quickly than could possibly be done by placing new men and another party in power. Remember, Lincoln said: "It is dangerous to swap horses in the middle of a stream."

You have no doubt read one of Lincoln's stories when at the White House one day some gentlemen from the West were much excited and displeased about the commissions or omissions of Lincoln's administration. Lincoln heard them patiently, and then replied:

> Gentlemen, suppose all the property you were worth was in gold and you had put it in the hands of Blondin to carry across Niagara River on a rope, would you shake the cable, or keep shouting out to him: "Blondin, stand up a little straighter; Blondin, stoop a little more; go a little faster; lean a little more to the south"? No; you would hold your breath, as well as your tongue, and keep your hands off until he was

safely over. The Government is carrying an immense weight. Untold treasures are in their hands. They are doing the best they can. Don't badger them. Keep silence and we will get you safe across.

In the present crisis President Wilson walks the cable which stretches from the United States clear across the ocean to dear old France—I love to think of helping France in her fight for liberty. It took a long time for her "bread cast upon the waters" to return, but when Gen. Pershing stood at the tomb of Lafayette, saluted and said, "Lafayette, we are here," the world knew our debt of gratitude to France was going to be paid with compound interest.

President Wilson is carrying on that cable the greatest treasures ever placed in the hands of any man since first the flight of time began. It is our very life, liberty, happiness, our homes, our Government, our country, and our all. He is doing the very best that any human being could possibly do. So, as Americans, keep your hands off. Do not shake the cable. Do not badger him. Keep silence and he will carry us safely across.

I have been down at Washington for the past five years helping to uphold the hands of the President and the administration in all its great progressive and constructive work, unequaled by any administration since the foundation of the Government. I hope to stay down there a while longer, for if there was ever a time when the President needs help it is during this war, and at times of political attacks, intrigues, and conspiracies against him.

As the President will be held responsible for the conduct of the war, I have felt he should be given a free rein, and not be hampered as Lincoln was by a War Cabinet. We already have a War Council of able and experienced men. We have no more need of a War Cabinet than a dog has of two tails. The Constitution makes the President Commander in chief of the Army and Navy, and Congress has no power to place this responsibility in any board. President Wilson has proven himself equal to every emergency, and I shall return to Washington and continue to back Woodrow Wilson with my whole body and soul.

I appeal to Kansas that as she stood by Lincoln in preserving the Union she now stand by Wilson in saving the world.

Woodrow Wilson places the rights of humanity above the ambitions of any ruler or the coveted strength or power of any nation. He wants all the people of the world to enjoy the rich blessings of liberty possessed by the people of the United States. As Napoleon is known in history as the great military genius, Washington as the great soldier and liberator, Jefferson as the great scholar and statesman, Lincoln as the great emancipator, Grant as the great general, Woodrow Wilson will be known in history as the great humanitarian. When the dove of peace shall spread her white wings over a charred and bloody world, when bitter partisanship of politics shall cease, when principle shall control the actions of men rather than appetite for office, and when ambition shall no longer lure men into unjust and unfair criticism, the historian, in his silent chamber of reflection will accord to President Wilson and this administration the highest place in the history of the greatest country in the world.

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